

Testimony of Richard Antonetti
Commerce Committee Public Hearing
February 19, 2015
LOB, Room 1D
10:00 AM

RE: IN SUPPORT OF PROPOSED S.B. 726, AN ACT CONCERNING RENAISSANCE DISTRICTS

Senator Hartley, Representative Perrone, Senator Frantz, Representative Camillo and members of the Commerce Committee, my name is Richard Antonetti. I reside in Watertown. I am here this morning to testify in support of Proposed S.B. 726, An Act Concerning Renaissance Districts, introduced by Sen. Robert Kane.

Small towns are the heart and soul of our great state of Connecticut. Most have populations in the 20,000 to 35,000 range, well under the 100,000 threshold established for many assistance programs. Most are struggling with "bare bones" municipal budgets. Most have aging downtown areas in desperate need of revitalization. There are few resources to help them.

This bill would amend Chapter 184b of the General Statutes to allow the Commissioner of Economic and Community Development to establish Renaissance Districts in downtown areas where multiple arts and cultural sites are already present, and provide tax incentives to encourage other arts and cultural sites to locate in such districts. It takes a comprehensive approach towards revitalizing an entire Main Street area through support and enhancement of existing arts and cultural venues, not just restoring one building at a time.

Watertown has a ready-made environment for such a "re-birth of the arts." Our Main Street is anchored on both ends by historic theatrical buildings. On one end we have the Country Cinema, a small gem of a period movie house in a building built in 1909. It originally served as a community center with a dance studio in the lower level. On the other end we have the active Clockwork Repertory Theater featuring community theatrical productions in a building dating from 1900. Both are in great need of renovation. Once restored, both have the potential for serving multiple community needs and organizations again.

We have a large, diverse arts community. This year an active Watertown/Oakville Merchants of Main Street Association was organized. They are working hard to save and revitalize our historic downtown area where most of the commercial buildings were built between 1900 and 1930. They cannot do it alone.

Your help by supporting passage of Proposed SB 726 would go a long way towards bringing renewed cultural and economic life to our small town, and give us hope for bright future.

Thank you for the opportunity of testifying before you today.